



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF
HOUSE BILL 7042: AN ACT CONCERNING THE PLACEMENT OF CHILDREN BY
THE COMMISSIONER OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Judiciary Committee
March 30, 2015

Submitted by Steven McClary-Smith

Senator Coleman, Representative Tong, and Distinguished Members of the Judiciary Committee:

My name is Steven McClary-Smith and I am here to testify in support of HB 7042, “An Act Concerning the Placement of Children by the Commissioner of Children and Families.” I am a youth testifying as a part of the New Haven LGBTQ* Youth Kickback (“Kickback”).

Kickback is a youth-led grassroots organization based in downtown New Haven. Kickback prioritizes, creates and expands safety, self-discovery, and leadership for queer youth every day through strong interpersonal connections and every week by developing youth-led educational workshops –normally attended by about 30+ young people -- based around issues we identify as important to the LGBTQ* community. Our workshops examine the intersections and axes of oppression and promote critical awareness as well as inspire and enable young people to create change and deconstruct power in their communities and on a city and state-wide level. In addition to weekly workshops every Monday, Kickback has created and led a trans literacy campaign that has educated and informed New Haven public high school students and faculty. We have achieved visibility on a municipal level and built sustained relationships with public officials, including Jason Bartlett, Director of Youth Services for the City of New Haven, as well as with other community organizations. Kickback provides a platform that centers youth experiences that are otherwise erased, underrepresented or invalidated, thereby building a community that would not otherwise exist. This diversity of perspectives allows us to address the ways in which structural and systemic injustices in our laws and society can affect people that may not fit the mainstream narrative.

If we as the state of Connecticut are going to tackle huge issues like racism, homophobia, transphobia, and poverty, we have to make sure that the people whom the laws are affecting have the opportunity to speak out. It is especially important to advocate for people whose voices often go unheard and are too often marginalized and largely unprotected institutionally. We value the power in our personal narratives and

interpersonal dialogue, and see and experience how the laws in Connecticut affect real people like ourselves. As leaders of our state, we count on our state policy-makers to advocate and represent our needs and perspectives. Connecticut has been at the forefront of the fight for trans rights and the rights of other historically marginalized and underrepresented groups, but together we can and must do more to enforce and protect those rights on the ground. It is imperative that our state leaders listen to youth who have experienced these oppressions and are working to eradicate the systemic barriers to success that all too many people in Connecticut face. We are those youth.

This current law doesn't allow youth to advocate for themselves. It allows one person to decide what is best for youth when that person doesn't know what is best for them because they are not in that youth's shoes. Just because a report states that a child is short-tempered and easily aggravated doesn't mean they are. You don't know what that child is going through to get them to respond the way they do. They are basically facing the world head on without a safety net to catch them when they fall. I know people who have loved ones in the care of DCF and they are literally worried because they don't feel safe. Their fate is dependent on a person who doesn't know who they are. The commissioner just sees them as a number instead of a person with feelings and emotions that needs to be respected.

Another important reason that the current law should be changed is that it is taking away these kids rights as human beings. These kids have rights and should be awarded those rights just like the rest of us. Why would we take that away from them? By allowing someone to control their well-being like this is unconstitutional. You are stripping them of their freedom of speech. If they are not a threat towards themselves as well as others why should they be put in an institution that just makes them believe there is something wrong with them when there is nothing wrong with them? Maybe if the power players that have the control to put these kids away spend a little bit more time trying to talk to these kids and get to know them besides believing whatever they see on paper then we wouldn't be in this situation we are in today. Youth just need someone to talk to and understand where they are coming from in their lives.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.